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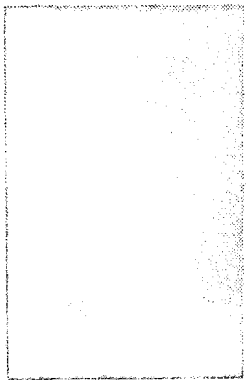
Tennesseans Lock Horns Over Assassination Probes

By WENDELL ROTTER
The Press-Scimitar Bureau

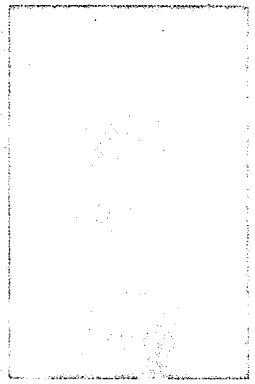
WASHINGTON. — Two members of Tennessee's congressional delegation are at odds over whether the House of Representatives should re-establish a special committee to investigate the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and former President John F. Kennedy.

Rep. James R. Quillen of Kingsport, ranking Republican on the House Rules Committee, says he feels Congress has far more important matters to deal with this year than assassinations that occurred in 1963 and 1968.

It was Quillen who led the opposition to recreating the special assassinations panel this week, both in the Rules Committee and on the House floer.



Rep. Quillen



Rep. Ford

On opposite sides of House debate.

BUT A DEMOCRAT congressman from the other end of the state, Rep. Harold Ford of Memphis, is a staunch defender of the House investigation, partly because he is a member of the special committee and partly because Dr. King was killed in the city he represents.

As of the end of last week, neither congressman could really claim victory in the battle over the special committee's future. By a slim margin last month, the House refused to permanently dismantle the committee, and to head off that sentiment, the House gave the committee only five months to come up with a reasonable budget and a plan of action to accomplish its purpose.

Quillen has moved against the House to disband the committee on the grounds that the committee last year before anyone had the courage to suggest that the committee would need $15 million to conduct its investigation over the next two years.

The East Tennessee congressman said as early as last April that the findings of any new investigations in his opinion would only confuse the issue more than ever, and that in the case of the King assassination, a new probe could lead to racial discussion in the country again.

And Quillen was outraged when the committee's chief counsel, Richard Sprague, told the House a few weeks after the committee's creation that he would need a minimum of $15 million a year to

large budget requested by Sprague, he insists there are questions about the King assassination that must be answered, regardless of what the public reaction might be.

The day after the House re-established the special committee on a temporary basis last week, Ford sent a letter to the new committee chairman with recommendation about proceeding with the probe.

"I am convinced," he wrote, "that this investigation is necessary to restore confidence and trust in our nation's institutions. We would be remiss if we failed to do everything possible to guarantee the future of this unprecedented inquiry by Congress."

FORD SUGGESTED to Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Texas, that he promptly send members of the committee to Tennessee to interview King's convicted assassin, James Earl Ray.

But as much as Ford wants the investigations to continue, Quillen is determined to try to stop them.

"I will keep urging about 1963 and 1968 and begin to act on the real issues of 1977," Quillen said during the House debate on the special committee last Wednesday.

He will have another opportunity to "stop the [illegible]" on March 8 when the committee chairman appears before the Rules Committee to outline what the committee wants to accomplish and how much it will cost to do it.

What cost is [illegible] the purpose and intent of the [illegible] Quillen [illegible]